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SUBJECT: Task force held hostage

REF: Kinshasa 196

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Predictions that Joint Monitoring Group Task Force (JMG-TF) meetings would be short and productive were overly optimistic. The February 23 meeting led off with a fascinating four-hour briefing on DDRRR, then endured five-and-a-half hours of Rwandan-led wrangling over minutes. Congo again failed to provide information on its FDLR sensitization program. The Task Force agreed to ask JMG Envoys for guidance regarding provision of order-of-battle information on Congo's FDLR military plan. Other members left the meeting demoralized, hungry and highly annoyed at the Rwandans. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Nitpicking and intransigence by the Rwandan delegation again dominated the weekly meeting of the Joint Monitoring Group Task Force for the Nairobi communique February 29 in Goma. The group's 11th session, chaired by MONUC-Goma political chief Gernot Sauer, featured an informative four-hour DDRRR briefing by MONUC and the World Bank (septel), followed by a five-and-a-half hour discussion of minutes totaling a record nine-and-a-half hour meeting. Other participants left the meeting demoralized, hungry and annoyed at the time wasted by the Rwandans' insistence on again rehashing the now-familiar litany of old concerns and diatribes.

¶3. (SBU) The Rwandans showed their willingness to argue over the slightest deviation from "the norm" right from the beginning when they questioned Sauer's decision to place briefings ahead of minutes on the agenda, reversing the usual order. An extensive discussion while the briefers waited patiently for things to be sorted out was necessary before the Rwandans reluctantly agreed to the change "on an exceptional basis."

Congolese again fail to brief on sensitization program

¶4. (SBU) The Congolese delegation again failed to provide a briefing on the FDLR sensitization program. Acting delegation head Major Ambroise Nanga apologized and claimed the "technical team" was unable to brief the group. Sauer pressed him to provide some details on the program. Nanga cited visits of Ambassador-at-Large Seraphin Ngwej to Bukavu, the National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe to Rutshuru, and North Kivu Provincial Assembly President Leon Bariyanga to Walikale. He also noted a proposed visit to Mpinga.

¶5. (SBU) The Rwandan delegation was predictably furious. Its members returned several times during the meeting to Congolese inability or unwillingness to provide information. Other Task Force members were also annoyed. The group agreed to "strongly urge" the government to make its presentation next week, and note the

recommendation in its report.

Rwandans swing into full force

¶16. (SBU) Briefings by MONUC DDRRR chief Phil Lancaster and the World Bank MDRP's Harold Henkel was followed by the five-and-a-half hour review of minutes -- about one-half of a page of text -- of the February 22 meeting. Efforts by Sauer and other international members to implement the streamlined, action-oriented proposal made by MONUC's Acting Political Adviser Christian Manahl (reftel) were stymied by longwinded rhetoric and extensive posturing by the Rwandan delegation. Adding to the confusion was the circulation of various drafts: one from MONUC, one from Congo and one from Rwanda, which was predictably longer and included the points its delegation raises each week.

¶17. (SBU) Sauer's efforts to remind the group that it had agreed to use the new format and to shorten the process were blocked at each step the Rwandans. Their threats not to sign because "the Task Force was proposing things that we cannot accept in the minutes" held the group virtually hostage to their demands. They insisted on making arguments raised in previous meetings, although it was not clear whether they did so to convince other members or to ensure the points would be included in the minutes of this meeting. Three of the four Rwandan delegates often took turns making essentially the same points.

¶18. (SBU) Sauer vainly attempted to shorten their presentations, or not call on them individually. The Rwandans protested: "the delegation from Rwanda would not allow Rwandan's sovereignty to be questioned;" and "Rwanda would never allow others to dictate its political positions."

¶19. (SBU) The Rwandans also questioned Manahl's interpretation and authority. In the absence of a report of the JMG Envoys' meeting, they insisted Manahl's views were his own and did not represent official guidance. Members' attempts to remind them that the Task Force had agreed to changes the week before were equally unsuccessful, as Rwandan delegations used "agreements" listed in the minutes as a basis for further harangues.

¶110. (SBU) The group agreed to ask the JMG envoys for guidance on the only substantive issue discussed: did the requirement to provide the order of battle mentioned in the Congolese military plan flow from the Nairobi communique or the Tripartite-Plus Mechanism? After consulting with other international members in an effort to break a deadlock, Sauer agreed to Rwandan-proposed language in the "summary of issues discussed," and request guidance in absence of consensus. At this point, the Rwandans agreed to sign the document.

Comment

¶111. (SBU) The Rwandans' behavior is winning them no new friends. Despite Manahl's clear message the previous week that too much time was being spent on the minutes and his candid recommendation that the Task Force change its ways, they yet again used the discussion of minutes to raise their usual talking points. The contrast between the first and second halves of the meeting was surreal: a fascinating brief with follow-up questions followed by a ceaseless wrangling over minutes dominated by the Rwandan need to hammer home the same points and control the meeting. One international member commented afterward that by the end he would have signed anything to get out. End comment.

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